

# Venezuela - Afro-Venezuelans

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 [minorityrights.org/minorities/afro-venezuelans/](http://minorityrights.org/minorities/afro-venezuelans/)

June 19, 2015



## Profile

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Because until 2011 Venezuela had not collected data on its black population since 1920, have estimates ranged from 7 to 60 per cent of the total population. While the 2011 census allowed community members to self-identify for the first time, the reported figures – 0.7 per cent of the total population identified themselves as Afro-descendant and 2.9 per cent as black, compared to 51.6 per cent as brown and 43.6 per cent as white – were far lower than the likely actual proportion.

Afro-Venezuelans have traditionally lived in the rural coastal zones of the country, but have begun to migrate to urban centres like Caracas in large numbers. Although Afro-Venezuelans have contributed to and are largely assimilated into mainstream Venezuelan or Creole culture, this population has still retained some of its own cultural heritage. The use of traditional drums in Afro-Venezuelan music, as well as dance and African-based spirituality demonstrate this.

## Historical context

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Enslaved Africans were transported to Venezuela mostly in the eighteenth century to work on the numerous cocoa plantations. Despite proposals by Simón Bolívar, 'The Liberator', slavery was not abolished upon independence in 1811, but rather some forty years later with the Law of Abolition of Slavery of 1854. By that time the enslaved population had substantially declined due both to economic factors and the common practice of manumission.

## Current issues

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Historically, urban and rural Afro-Venezuelans have not identified themselves in ethnic terms, but rather according to their class and geographic position. This may be due to a general lack of consciousness, but may also be an explicit denial of blackness because it is devalued in this

society. Due to increased mobilization by local NGOs, Afro-Venezuelans, and youth in particular, are beginning to reaffirm their identity and culture.

Despite the existence of some notable Afro-Venezuelans in high-level positions in the government and private sector, Afro-Venezuelans continue to be the victims of discrimination and racial prejudice. This discrimination can be especially violent in poorer areas where police forces still often act with impunity and racial profiling is rampant. Moreover, nearly 40 per cent of Venezuelans live under the poverty line and the concentration of people of African descent in poorer regions and neighbourhoods suggest that poverty rates are higher among this population.

Furthermore, the community struggles for acceptance and recognition: many Venezuelans do not regard Afro-Venezuelans as a distinct group and the government still has no official data on their numbers. However, music and other cultural forms of expression have helped the community gain some visibility in recent years. An important milestone for the community came in 2011 when for the first time the community were able to self-identify as Afro-descendant in the national census. Until then, there had been no official classification for the community.

*Updated December 2017*